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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a historical commentary on some of the literature on the language predicament--and especially the kind of bilingual community--found in the Irish Gaeltacht. The Gaeltacht communities in Ireland constitute a residual minority of what was, until recent times, the major linguistic group on the island. Conquest and colonization during the 16th and 17th centuries defeated the entire Gaelic order. The key determinant of identity became the question of religious loyalty. The leaders of the Catholic community, whether of Gaelic or Anglo-Norman stock, accepted that Irish was the language of the dispossessed and worked to ensure that their religion would not preclude their civil rights. In 1922, Irish was declared the official language of the new Free State. In 1925, a Commission established to inquire into the condition of the Gaeltacht, condemned the anglicization of official forms and identified four groups responsible for linguistic development in the Gaeltacht: the Catholic clergy, the professions, the press, and the directors of industrial and commercial establishments. The Commission proposed planned migration of 'homogeneous communities' to land that could support a community. However, real Gaeltacht communities declined due to emigration to industrial centers abroad. (Contains 24 references.) (CK)

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The Development of the Gaeltacht as a Bilingual Entity

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The Development of the Gaeltacht as a Bilingual Entity

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The development of the Gaeltacht as a bilingual entity

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This essay takes the form of a commentary on some of the literature on the language predicament - and especially the kind of bilingual community - to be found in the Irish Gaeltacht. The perspective is, of necessity, historical. I have no expertise in socio-linguistics, though much of the data and the bulk of the analytical literature on which I will be commenting is the work of socio-linguists and social geographers[1]. However, it is hoped that an historical perspective may help in a modest way both to refine and to enlarge the context of explanation, and our understanding, of the language predicament in the Gaeltacht. Let us begin, therefore, with a few remarks on the historical setting.

The Gaeltacht

The Gaeltacht communities in Ireland together constitute, in historical terms, a residual minority. That is to say, they are the scattered remnants of what was until recent times the major linguistic group on this island. In discussing this community and its predicament either in its contemporary or its historical setting it is impossible to avoid reference to the linguistic situation in the country as a whole. But for the purposes of this essay our concern is primarily with those communities in counties Donegal, Galway, Kerry, and, to a lesser extent, Mayo, Cork and Waterford, together with the more recently planted Gaeltacht in Co. Meath, where Irish is the communal language through historical transmission rather than a 'teanga teallaigh', or language of the household, through idealogical commitment.

The decisive period for the fate of the Irish language was undoubtedly the 16th and 17th centuries, the period of conquest and colonization which saw the defeat of the entire Gaelic order, the dispossession and displacement of its leaders, and the almost total eclipse of Gaelic culture and of the language which sustained it. The significance of the conquest, however, was that the key determinant of identity, of dispossession and endowment, became the question of religious loyalty. Here, in practical terms, Catholic and Gaelic were not synonymous. The dispossessed Catholics of the 16th and 17th centuries included many of Norman or English stock. Some of those who conformed to the state church were of Gaelic stock. As a consequence of this,

the Catholic struggle for civil and political rights during the 18th century was not a struggle for the restoration of Gaelic civilization, though the Gaelic poets did not accept this. The leaders of the Catholic community, the gentry, commercial and professional classes, whether of Gaelic or Anglo-Norman stock, accepted the fact of Gaelic cultural and linguistic defeat. They accepted that Irish was the language of the defeated and the dispossessed, and they got on with the task of ensuring that their religion would not debar them from entering fully into the civil and political life of the country under the new English order. As the leaders became acculturalised and made progress in the world, the shattered rank and file of the Gaelic army were not slow to learn the lesson. In the hedge-schools, and in every other way open to them, Irish-speaking parents sought to give their children English, the language of success and of social mobility. In short, as one historian has succinctly put it:

> "By 1800 Irish had ceased to be the language habitually spoken in the homes of all those who had already achieved success in the world, or who aspired to improve or even maintain their position politically, socially or economically."[1(a)]

Irish was recognized as the language of poverty and of defeat.

Nevertheless, up to the eve of the great famine the absolute number of Irish speakers continued to increase, and by 1841 there were probably more than three million Irish-speakers in the country, the highest figure ever in our history. This demographic oddity is easily explained. In the pre-famine decades the growth of population had been strongest among those classes at the bottom of the social structure, - the labourers, cottiers and small-holders - that is, among the poorer classes, those whose language was Irish. The famine, through death and emigration, decimated these social classes, and its linguistic significance was reflected in the census figures from 1851 onwards, and especially from the 1870s when the rate of emigration from the poorer counties of the west began to run ahead of the national average. By the early 1870s there was still probably more than a million people using Irish as their daily vernacular over large areas west of a line from Lough Swilly to Cork, with a surviving Gaeltacht still in east Munster and in pockets of Leinster. But the retreat to the Atlantic seaboard was in full spate, and by 1891 the number of *native* Irish speakers had declined to just over 700,000, while the concentration of these in Irish-speaking *communities* or Gaeltachtaí would probably have been below a half-million. In that year the census revealed that while about 14.5% of the population were bilingual, over 85% were monoglot English-speakers, leaving less than 1% monoglot Irish-speakers. This staggering evidence of decline brought a response from groups concerned with the language, and it is significant that whereas in the pre-famine era any interest shown by the educated classes in Irish was essentially antiquarian or scholarly in motive, from the 1870s onwards it is the preservation of the living

vernacular from extinction which was the motivating force for the activities of a succession of groups and societies which culminated in the foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893. For all the League's energies and successes, which need not detain us here, it did not succeed in checking the inter-censal drop in the number of native Irish-speakers or in the contraction of the Gaeltacht.

It is easy to list the factors which had collectively caused this depressing decline in the period between the famine and the establishment of the Free State. Heavy emigration from Irish-speaking areas was a major factor; so also was the penetration of Irish-speaking areas to an ever-increasing extent by the state - in the form of police, teachers, and petty local bureaucrats; the expansion of the retail trade network; the incentives offered by a rising level of jobs in the state service (these same clerkships, teaching posts, etc.) and by the fact that expanded educational facilities in Irish-speaking areas opened such careers to the children of the hitherto isolated west to an ever-increasing degree. The advance of democracy - meaning popular involvement in English-speaking politics - was important, as were the improvements in communication and transport which facilitated emigration and which increased the consciousness of Irish speakers in the poorer areas of the world outside - where living standards were higher and where English was the language of mobility and success.

The Church too played its part. As soon as it became clear that conversion to English did not mean conversion to Protestantism, the Catholic church, in general, became a willing accomplice in the process of linguistic change which the aspirations of the laity were dictating.

The Irish State and the Gaeltacht

Prior to 1922 the only serious attempt made to improve living conditions in the Gaeltacht areas was made under the auspices of the Congested Districts Board, established in 1891. Significantly, all the areas in the present Gaeltacht, with the exception of An Rinn, Co. Waterford, came under the jurisdiction of the CDB's improvement schemes. But the CDB operated on socio-economic premises only, and in linguistic terms it succeeded in increasing the extent and the pace of English penetration of Gaeltacht areas. However, it was scarcely to be expected that a British government would seek to arrest Gaeltacht depopulation and contraction on linguistic or cultural grounds. This would not apply in the case of an Irish state founded on the assumption that a sovereign state inferred a distinct national identity and that the Irish language was the most authentic and important index of this identity. Thus it was that in 1922 Irish was declared the official language of the new Free State and a policy for its revival was inaugurated concentrating on the schools and the civil service. It was acknowledged that the Gaeltacht was the living

spring from which the language revival would seek nourishment, and in 1925 a Commission was established to enquire into the condition of the Gaeltacht.

The chairman of the Commission was Risteárd Ó Maolcatha and its members included such well-known language revivalists as Risteárd Ó Fodhlú (Fiachra Éilgeach), P. Ó Siochrú (An Seabhach) and Séamus Ó hEocha (An Fear Mór). Between April and October 1925 the commissioners visited areas in counties Donegal, Galway, Mayo, Clare, Kerry, Cork, Waterford and Louth. Evidence was also taken from witnesses in Dublin. Some 100 witnesses gave public evidence and others made written submissions. The report of the commission, even while greatly exaggerating the size of the Irish-speaking communities, concluded that the situation of the Gaeltacht was deeply disturbing. The Report suggested that in areas where Irish was the daily vernacular for 80% or more of the population there was a total population of c. 147,000, while the population of areas where between 25% and 79% used Irish as a vernacular was c. 110,000. In effect, this meant that the Report claimed a population of about a quarter of a million for Fíor-Ghaeltacht and Breac-Ghaeltacht combined. This, as Ó Cuív pointed out in 1951, was a rather gross inflation of the 'real' Gaeltacht population.[2]

The main recommendations of the commissioners can be easily summarized. Finding that only 10% of public servants working in Gaeltacht areas were competent to conduct their business through Irish it made a series of proposals aimed at rectifying this situation and at ensuring linguistic competence among servants of the state in Gaeltacht areas. Special attention was recommended for those government departments - such as Lands, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Social Welfare - which had a particularly important influence in Gaeltacht areas. The anglicization of the forms of placenames, of birth-certificates and of official forms was strongly condemned. Four groups were identified as having a particular repsonsibility for linguistic developments in the Gaeltacht due to their accepted role as leaders in the community. These four groups were (a) the Catholic clergy (b) the professions (c) the press (d) directors of industrial and commercial establishments. Through consultation, exhortation, and the gaelicization of the education system, it was hoped that these groups would throw their weight behind the preservation and use of Irish as a vernacular in the Gaeltachtaí. On the economic front, the commission concentrated on land and fisheries and limited home crafts - there is virtually nothing in the report on industrialization as such. Apart from predictable and highly laudable proposals for the provision of education facilities relevant to the exploitation of the natural resources and craft skills of the area, and for a system of grants and aids in agricultural development, the most controversial and significant recommendation of the commission was that relating to the solution of the basic problem of heavy population

pressure on generally very poor land. The commission favoured the break-up of large estates and land redistribution; where state-sponsored population movement was advisable it proposed that English-speaking groups should be the groups to emigrate. But even at this, the commissioners conceded that congestion in western Donegal, Erris in Co. Mayo and in Connemara was so chronic that emigration of some Irish-speakers from these areas was inevitable. Here it proposed planned migration of 'homogenous communities', and their settlement, preferably in other parts of Donegal, Mayo and Galway, or alternatively in counties Sligo, Roscommon, Wicklow, Kildare or Meath. In effect, this meant planned Gaeltacht transplants to land which could support a community in tolerable comfort.

These were the main proposals of the Gaeltacht Commission of 1925-26. During the following thirty years or so relatively few of these recommendations were implemented with any energy or consistency, and even where some effort was made to implement some of the proposals the results were disappointing. Under native Government the last Gaeltacht pockets in west Clare and east Cork were allowed to die. In the surviving Gaeltacht areas the story up to c. 1960 was one of relentless contraction and decline. A litany of grants, loans, incentives and boundaries conferred on the Gaeltacht in the thirty years after 1925 were no more than so many plugs in a shattering dyke. By 1961 the officially enumerated figure of Gaeltacht Irish-speakers was down to c. 75,000; in reality this was still probably 'about double the true numbers of habitual native speakers' at the time.[3] Miraculously, the transplanting of a small Gaeltacht colony to Co. Meath in the late 1930s succeeded, in some measure, in transmitting the language to a second generation of Gaeltacht immigrants in their new habitat.[4] But the general story is a depressing one of demographic decline and territorial contraction of 'real' Gaeltacht communities.

Causes of decline

The reasons for this catastrophic decline were complex, but some of them can be listed at once. Emigration was a major factor - not planned migration of 'homogenous communities' to other parts of the country, but a haemorrage of the young and enterprising to Boston, New York and Chicago up to the 1930s, and thereafter, to the 1960s, chiefly to the industrial centres of Britain.

It was an exodus which left as a legacy a chronically defective social structure in the Gaeltacht areas. The Gaeltacht experience was here part of the general tragedy of western depopulation. Not only were some of the economic schemes tried in the Gaeltacht ill-conceived, under-financed and generally poorly implemented, but most fundamentally the State in these decades did not have a coherent policy of economic investment and social planning within

the context of overall community development. The media, both of information and entertainment, worked steadily in favour of English, despite the efforts of a dedicated few to provide newspaper and ephemeral reading material in Irish for the Gaeltacht communities. The sense of isolation of the various Gaeltachtaí increased as time went on and as the contraction continued. As the intervening bands of English became ever-widening wedges, even dialect differences became more of a problem in inter-Gaeltacht communication. Up to the 1960s the annual Oireachtas or the occasional programme on Radio Éireann were the main opportunities for people from the different Gaeltachtaí to meet or even hear each other (apart, that is, from their discovery of each other in Boston, Chicago, London or Northampton). The potentially disruptive impact of tourism on the language situation in the Gaeltacht was mitigated somewhat by the presence of a sizeable constituency of committed language-enthusiasts and learners among the visitors to Gaeltacht areas. The policy of the Catholic Church was inconsistent, depending almost entirely on the sensitivity of local bishops to the language factor, and on their willingness to act decisively.

The difficulties and decline of the Gaeltacht in the generation after independence were also a function of size, of geography and of attitudes. The fact that the Gaeltachtaí are rather scattered enclaves makes them unamenable to bureaucratic convenience or administrative economies. Servicing them properly as distinct linguistic communities (e.g. in services such as schools, hospitals, occupational facilities) will, of necessity, carry certain costs. So far as attitudes are concerned, space permits only a brief notice of some of the complexity of Gaeltacht attitudes towards the language and, more particularly, towards declared State policy on the language. It has been pointed out that the Gaeltacht community constitutes a most unusual linguistic minority, that is, a minority 'under the protection of its own ethnic state'.[5] The Irish language - the actual community-language of the Gaeltacht - has been the *declared* national language since the foundation of the Irish national state in 1922, and is both the national language and the *first* official language of the State's constitution since 1937. But the Gaeltacht communities have traditionally been described in independent Ireland (and indeed for some time before 1922) in two very different sets of terms. On the one hand they have been considered residual communities, that is to say, the last enclaves in which is still spoken what was for most of our recorded history the majority community language on this island. On the other hand, language revivalists have frequently described them as growth points; if not in the strictly geographical sense 'growth centres', then at least as 'seed communities' for the extension of the language, for its revival as a vital community language throughout Ireland as a whole.

Consider for a moment the very different implications, the psychological response at an individual and at a collective level, of these two 'versions' of the Gaeltacht; the implications for the self-image and self-estimate of Gaeltacht people and the prospects for the transmission of the language to the succeeding generation. Implicit in the last redoubt or residuum version is the motion of an inexorable tide of modernization/anglicisation which has simply been delayed/halted but which will ultimately and inevitably wash over these Gaeltacht 'islands' in the west. Implicit in the 'seed-community' version is a very different notion of the Gaeltacht, with more dynamic and assertive connotations. To take this question of attitudes just one step further; how complex must the attitude towards language transmission be for people who have had their language proclaimed as the official language of the state, constantly affirmed as the authentic repository of the national identity, and then been allowed to wither away as a community?

Further ambiguities permeate the relationship between the native Irish speaker, rural based and linguistically unsentimental, and the committed language enthusiast with a town or city background. Yet in the strategy of the language revival each needs the other. Most fundamental of all, however, is the cultural and linguistic fatalism which has hung like s shadow over Gaelic Ireland since Kinsale and which the establishment of an Irish state failed to dispel. This sense of defeat, the acceptance of the inevitability of decline, re-echoes through Gaelic poetry from the 17th century onwards. It clung tenaciously to the Gaeltacht community. When Pearse attempted to lecture the people of Rosmuc on the importance of their language, he was quickly reminded of its limited utility - 'is beag an mhaith í nuair a ghabhann tú thar an Teach Dóite' (it is of little use to you when you go beyond Maam Cross). The Gaeltacht Commissioners of 1925 put it bluntly; 'Those who spoke Irish traditionally saw no avenue of advancement open to them or their children without English. Thus it came to be accepted that the language was destined to pass'. This sense of finality is epitomised by that most quoted cliché of blasket autobiography - 'Mar ná beidh ár leithéidí arís ann'.

The psychological effect of this fatalism is reflected in the writings of several Gaeltacht writers. One thinks of Máirtín Ó Cadhain's anguished articulation of the predicament of the creative writer, writing in a language which might not long survive him, and there are echoes of the same *cri de coeur* in Brendán Ó h-Eithir's frequent musings in his journalistic writings, as to whether or not the writer in Irish has in fact a public. These doubts and anxieties are only voiced explicitly, of course, by the few. But behind them lies the collective vote of no confidence in the future of the language given by generations of native speakers.

New directions: The 1950s

This historical situation in the Gaeltacht - in both pre- and immediate post-independence Ireland - began to undergo significant changes from the later 1950s. The new state strategy of economic growth (the rejection of the self-sufficiency model, the emphasis on growth and on exports, the acceptance of foreign investment, and the acceptance of the need for structures and procedures for economic and, to a much smaller degree, social planning) also affected the conditions in the Gaeltacht.[6] In the mid-1950s the geographical extent of the Gaeltacht was, at last, officially defined, and at the same time a special agency, *Gaeltarra Éireann*, was established to promote economic development and social improvement in the Gaeltacht. So far as territoriality and demographic data are concerned, the 'official' Gaeltacht of the late 1950s (with subsequent amendments/extensions to its size) was inaccurate from the beginning, while the 'official' figures of the past two decades have provoked a chorus of disbelief and criticism from virtually everybody who has been engaged in even the most cursory examination (to say nothing of detailed research based upon field-work) of the real situation in the Gaeltacht in recent decades.[7] For example, while the 1981 census claims that the 'official' Gaeltacht (covering c. 7% of the land area of the state) has a population of 79,500 (2.3% of the state's population), with 77.4% of those over three years of age in this population reporting themselves as Irish-speakers, Dr. Reg Hindley, a trenchant critic of the official figures, has concluded that 'the most generous current estimates of habitual speakers give a maximum of 21,000 and school Irish-figures suggest about half of that as the hard core'.[8]

The impact on the Gaeltacht of economic developments since the 1960s is discussed further below, but it is appropriate to mention here some of the other significant socio-cultural forces which brought change to the Gaeltacht (as to the country as a whole) since the 1960s. The increased mobility - to work and for leisure - which came with improved living standards; the post-Vatican II changes in the devotional and organizational life of the Catholic Church (notably the vernacular liturgy); the improved access to educational opportunity and the important changes in curriculum and syllabi; the extension of the State's role in health, social welfare and other areas; the communications revolution, most notably the introduction of an overwhelmingly English-medium national television service in 1962; these, and other, forces were at work in the Gaeltacht, as elsewhere in Ireland, from the 1960s. One consequence of these changes was a greater awareness of, and responsiveness to, external, global movements among Gaeltacht people, especially among an increasingly better-educated Gaeltacht youth. Thus, the global dynamics of youth politics and civil rights agitation in the later 1960s found expression in the Gaeltacht, where a Gaeltacht civil rights movement (with a significant role played by young educated members) challenged the traditional cultural fatalism and the official rhetoric of the State.

The new aggressiveness brought results. A long-promised Gaeltacht radio service was finally established by the State in 1972; a number of Gaeltacht Co-operatives were established and undertook several schemes of social and economic improvement for the community (e.g. water schemes, bulk-buying of raw materials); a network of parish councils improved communication and morale between Gaeltacht parishes; sporting and cultural events improved cohesion between the different Gaeltacht areas; a newspaper specifically for the Gaeltacht (though mainly Conamara-centred) was a further sign of the new confidence. Above all, there was a demand for a specific Gaeltacht Authority, to give some cohesion (and a democratic basis) to integrated social and economic development in the Gaeltacht.[9]

The cumulative impact of these socio-economic changes since the 1960s on language behaviour in the Gaeltacht has been a main concern of recent socio-linguistic research. Bilingualism in the Gaeltacht (as in the State as a whole) means bilingualism in Irish and English, as an alternative to monolingualism in English; monoglot Irish-speakers were already a negligible factor at the foundation of the State. What matters, however, in respect of Gaeltacht bilingualism is whether the bilinguals are primary bilinguals in Irish or in English; what trends can we discern; what are (or have been) the key determinants of the form of bilingualism to be found in the Gaeltacht; what kind of forecasts can we make regarding future developments. In answering the question, 'in a bilingual state, who becomes bilingual?', Professor W.F. Mackey has replied:

> "That often depends on whose language one has to learn. While low status speakers learn high status languages, high status speakers rarely learn low status languages. ..... Status has many faces. But it mainly has to do with people; who they are, how many they are, what they own, where they live, what they do, and even how they look ... The status of a language depends, therefore, on the number of people using it, their relative wealth, the importance of what they produce and its dependence on language, their social cohesiveness, and the acceptance by others of their right to be different. In other words, the faces of language status are demographic, economic, social, cultural, political and judicial."[10]

Deomographic dimension

Applying these criteria to the Gaeltacht, the historic pattern of demographic decline was arrested and reversed between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s. In the Gaeltacht as a whole the population stabilized, with several areas experiencing an increase in population. But there were a number of noteworthy features of this interlude of population maintenance. While population

was maintained (and, in some areas, increased) this did not mean that the Gaeltacht succeeded in *retaining* its native-born population. In fact, all three main Gaeltacht areas continued to lose a significant number of young adults through emigration; but in-migration (with a high quota of married couples with children) compensated for the emigration losses. This, of course, had implications not only for the age-structure of the Gaeltacht population but also for the language-balance within the Gaeltacht. As returned emigrants or immigrants stabilized overall population levels in the Gaeltacht, there was an increasing chance that these in-migrants would include monolingual English-speakers (most crucially, perhaps, mothers whose language for communicating with their young children was already securely established as English). This had serious implications for language behaviour in the Gaeltacht - in homes, schools, shops, leisure and general social interaction.

There were, it seems, variations between the three main Gaeltachtaí. The out-migration of young adults was highest from the Kerry Gaeltacht, where industrialization and general economic development was weakest during the period 1965-81. The Gaeltachtaí of Galway and Donegal were most successful in retaining their young adults, but because of industrialization and economic development (including tourism) these areas also experienced a high incidence of in-migration.[11]

There is a further aspect of population stabilization/growth worthy of notice. While the actual number of self-reported Irish-speakers in the Gaeltacht actually increased (by c. 13%) during the 1970s, yet the Irish-speaking population declined as a proportion of total population in the Gaeltacht. Moreover, it is clear that ability-levels in Irish within Gaeltacht areas do not support an optimistic view of the prospects for continued high-ability, high-usage of Irish, and in particular for a high level of intergenerational transmission of Irish within the Gaeltacht. As Commins has reported, the percentage of Irish-speakers in the Gaeltacht (aged three and over) in the period 1961-81 declined as follows:

1961	1971	1981
86.6%	82.9%	77.4%

Taking the 1971 figure it is disturbing to find that in the toddler age-group (3-4) just under 60% were reported as Irish-speakers. What this means, to quote Cummins, is that: "If the percentage of Irish-speakers among 3-4 year olds is assumed to indicate the extent of home-generated ability, then it is clear that in the early 1970s, at least, 35% to 40% of Gaeltacht children were not learning Irish in the family home. On the other hand, the proportion of school-going children returned as Irish-speakers was over 80%. This suggests that a substantial number of Gaeltacht parents now rely on the schools to give their children a knowledge of Irish".[12] One might add that, in the absence of

specific counter-measures, the lower the group-level ability in 1971 the more rapid will be the decline as time goes on.

Economic factors

Turning to the specifically economic 'face' of language status, we have already noted that the reversal of historic demographic patterns in the Gaeltacht from the 1960s was the function of a complex set of socio-economic changes. It is arguable that the economic forces were the key determinants of language status and behaviour; to paraphrase Mackey, 'the language of work is the language which achieves economic status'.[13] The economic 'retardation' of the Gaeltacht regions between 1922 and the early 1960s is a familiar story. In particular, state policy for the Gaeltacht in this period has been described as 'designed more for the containment or marginal improvement of a rural economy than for the development of a new economic base'.[14] In effect, this rural economy was characterised by subsistence farming on mainly poor land by non-viable (in terms of farm/fishing-generated income) small-holders; very poor infrastructure and negligible off-farm employment.

A few comments may be made on this phase (1922-c.1960) of Gaeltacht economic retardation. Not surprisingly, it failed to secure population maintenance in the Gaeltacht. In terms of the language of work, however, this phase of economic policy was likely to be minimally disruptive of the transmission of Irish as the language of the Gaeltacht. 'Traditional' jobs with minimal linkages with English-speaking sectors of the economy; underdeveloped tourism, and scarcely any 'disruptive' flow of in-migrants; this may have been economically and socially a formula for stagnation, but linguistically it was likely (when taken in conjunction with other variables of social organization and institutional support) to facilitate a relatively high level of ability and usage among an admittedly skewed (in age-structure) Gaeltacht population. It is arguable, moreover, that this condition of economic stagnation was not simply the result of State neglect or indifference, but was, rather, consistent with a social vision of the Gaeltacht which one can find in the evidence of various witnesses, and in some of the recommendations, of the Gaeltacht Commission of 1926. An idealization of rural life, of 'traditional' life-styles in the Gaeltacht, an implicitly anti-industrial bias; an extraordinarily static vision of Gaeltacht society, timelessly in tune with the elemental values of the Irish people; the repository of the linguistic elixir of Irish nationhood; a vision encapsulated in the phrase 'tobar fíor-ghlan na Gaeilge' - the uncontaminated well-spring of the national language, from which the rest of the country could continue to draw sustenance.

Economic developments since the 1960s (to which *Gaeltarra Éireann* and, since 1979, *Údarás na Gaeltachta* have given some direction) brought a measure of

industrialization to the two larger Gaeltachtaí, in Connemara (relatively dispersed) and Donegal (in a relatively concentrated industrial zone), together with other improvements (increased tourism, limited investment in infrastructure and indigenous resources, e.g. agriculture and fishing) which touched all the Gaeltacht areas, albeit very unevenly. So far as results are concerned, the economic/industrial drive certainly created jobs (even during the difficult 1980s), and the general population increase up to the early 1980s was an index of the improved economic environment.[15] But industrial development and increased tourism have often taken place without due regard for (some would say with dangerous indifference to) the impact of these forms of economic development on language behaviour in the Gaeltacht. While it is impossible to isolate totally the strictly economic from the general socio-cultural developments (many of them related, directly or indirectly, to state-directed activities) which affected language-behaviour in the Gaeltacht, still a few points must be made on the consequences of this recent economic growth strategy.

Firstly, it may be true that industrialization *per se* need not lead inevitably to a shift to English as the dominant language of the work-place[16]; and that in order to determine what is likely to be the dominant language of the work-place we need to take into account the location of the plant, the nature of the product (what specialist vocabulary or terminology it demands), the composition/language-mix of the work-force, the extent of the linkages with English-speaking services, the language of management, the origin and language attitudes/sensitivity of the plant-owners. Yet it remains a matter of historical fact that the industrialization drive of the past twenty years has weakened the Irish language and its 'economic status' in the Gaeltacht, through an adverse combination of those factors already listed and in the absence of strict and strictly-enforced conditions of language use in the grant-aiding or indeed even in the siting of manufacturing plants in the Gaeltacht.

Secondly, the Gaeltacht development agency - *Gaeltarra Éireann* and more latterly, *Údarás na Gaeltachta* - for in truth the *Údarás* is essentially a development agency with some elected members rather than a comprehensive Gaeltacht Authority with powers covering the range of matters involved in integrated economic, social and cultural planning - can not escape responsibility for what has happened. While *Gaeltarra Éireann* acknowledged its responsibility to take into consideration the likely linguistic impact of any grant-aided development, and while *Údarás na Gaeltachta* has made some efforts to discharge its linguistic obligations *in tandem* with its economic objectives, nevertheless in the adverse economic conditions in which they have had to operate - in particular the high premium put on job-creation - it was unlikely that the development agencies would be seriously inhibited in their economic activities by doubts regarding linguistic consequences.

Thirdly, the relatively optimistic view which some commentators take of recent re-emphasis of natural/indigenous resources (and of small-scale industrial development with native entrepreneurs) as the basis for Gaeltacht economic development may need a word of caution. Activities such as fishing, fish-farming or processing, afforestation, are no longer likely to be dominated by individual small-holders working in isolation or as a neighbourly *meitheal* (or, indeed, even in a co-operative); but, as capital-intensive growth industries, are likely to involve banks and finance houses, business consortia and agencies with the expertise to achieve major profits from the economic resources. Moreover, it is questionable if these 'traditional' activities (fishing, farming etc.) are any longer really 'traditional' (in terms of familiarity with the relevant vocabulary) for a sizeable portion of young adults in the Gaeltacht. In short, we may conclude that it cannot be assumed without question that the language situation in a work-context would necessarily be better if the work in question were fish-farming rather than the making of opthalmic lenses. The work-based economic status of Irish will continue to be problematic in the Gaeltacht for the foreseeable future.

One final aspect of the economic status of the Irish language for Gaeltacht people which calls for brief comment is the status of the language for Gaeltacht people seeking or finding work *outside* the Gaeltacht. Up to the mid-1960s the favour enjoyed by the Gaeltacht in the official rhetoric of the language revival in the country as a whole, did bring certain material advantages. Apart from special grants (of only marginal advantage) we have to take into account the Preparatory Colleges, special scholarships, special recruitment schemes for the army and the Gardaí, the language requirement in public examinations and for certain promotions in the public service. All of these gave a direct advantage to a limited number of educated Gaeltacht school-leavers within the Irish state. As such, they enhanced the economic status of Irish and, it may be assumed, were affirmative in regard to Gaeltacht attitudes towards the language and its transmission. The reduction in the status of the language which followed its removal as a qualification for entry to the Civil Service in 1973 most likely weakened its status among Gaeltacht people also.

Socio-cultural factors

This matter of the status of the language in general state policies brings us to the socio-cultural status of Irish. In this context it is as well to heed Commins' warning that: "... because of the convention linking economic development and language survival, state language policy has been too narrowly entrusted to special Gaeltacht development agencies; this underrates the wider influence of the state on linguistic trends through the recent general expansion in the public administration system".[17] Space permits only brief comment on a

number of these other socio-cultural forces at work in Gaeltacht language behaviour. Clearly, education is a vital dimension of state policy. And, as Mackey again has remarked: "In no field of social organization, however, is language more decisive than it is in the domain of education. It is through the schools that a language is transformed from a family vernacular to a vehicle for cultural, scientific and professional advancement. Any group which, in the course of this transformation, must switch to another language reduces to that extent the social status of its mother tongue".[18] In assessing whether or not state education policy was affirmative in respect of Irish in the Gaeltacht, the following points may be made:

(a) In the period up to the mid-1960s, the period of 'limited access' to second and third level education for Gaeltacht as for Irish youth in general, the status of Irish in the Gaeltacht probably benefitted from the prevailing national policy. Irish was compulsory for public examinations, for entry to (and for promotion within) the Civil Service, and was an advantage in other parts of the public sector; it was, specifically, a route for advancement for a small quota of bright Gaeltacht adolescents and young adults. There were, it is true, gaps and inadequacies in the state education provision for the Gaeltacht: the proposed development of comprehensive university courses through Irish at University College, Galway, made only limited progress; the text-book problem was never satisfactorily resolved (not merely the over-all supply problem, but the matter of standardized spelling, sensitivity to local dialects etc.); there was no major review of the appropriateness of syllabi and texts in Irish and English for the Gaeltacht schools, as distinct from schools in the rest of the country; the heavy centralization of state educational policy and planning militated against a more flexible response to specific Gaeltacht needs. For all that, however, it is likely that state policy in education was, on balance, status-enhancing for Irish in the Gaeltacht up to the the mid-1960s.

(b) The great expansion in education opportunities (and other structural and curriculur changes) since the mid-1960s have had a significant - and largely disruptive - impact on the status of Irish in the education of Gaeltacht people. A huge rise in participation rates at second level and, in a more limited way, at third level; a new range of educational institutions - RTCs and NIHEs; school amalgamation, transport system to second level schools and general 'rationalization' of education, in rural areas in particular; new developments in the curriculum, including extra subjects

and new syllabi, all without adequate planning or provision for texts and other teaching resources in Irish; vocational state-sponsored education/training by new agencies, such as ANCO or, more latterly, FÁS; the removal of Irish as a compulsory subject for the award of national certificates and for entry to the Civil Service (or for entry to the *new* third level institutions). These were the main developments, the cumulative impact of which was to seriously disrupt and diminish the educational status of Irish in the Gaeltacht. The existing fragile provision for Irish-medium teaching at all levels was swamped by the great increase in numbers as well as by curricular and other changes; whole areas of new educational activities came into being largely untouched by any considerations of language. In general, the existing resource base already being inadequate, the system for providing education through Irish in the country as a whole was badly shaken; the system in the Gaeltacht suffered an even greater shock. English as the language of education has made major in-roads in the Gaeltacht, or, more precisely, an increasing portion of Gaeltacht children and adults have had to avail of opportunities for educational advance (both within and outside the Gaeltacht) through the medium of English. The damaging effects of these developments on the status of Irish in the Gaeltacht have been logged and lamented by a plethora of language organizations and official bodies, most notably Bord na Gaeilge. There has been no shortage of proposals for state-led corrective action; but to date, it has to be admitted, with minimal effect.[19]

Turning briefly to the 'cultural' face of language-status in the Gaeltacht, it isn't difficult to give an inventory of what is lacking: there is no thriving indigenous Irish-language cinema, despite some brave and creative initiatives by Bob Quinn; the Irish-language theatre produces only an occasional flicker in the Gaeltacht; publishing is rather healthier, with the volume and variety of books for adults and young children (though not for adolescents) showing improvement in recent years. There is no satisfactory Irish-language newspaper with a decent circulation in the Gaeltacht. Gaeltacht-orientated newspapers have been short-lived, while no 'national' Irish-language newspaper has yet succeeded in simultaneously serving its mission to the scattered constituency of Irish-speakers throughout the country as a whole *and* serving a Gaeltacht community of faithful readers. The same is true of Irish-language magazines.

The story isn't uniformly bleak. If we accept that, in addition to key institutions, there are also key roles for public events, rituals, social customs,

in sustaining a sense of community, then the revival of interest in (and respect, nationally and internationally, as well as locally, for) sean-nós (traditional) singing, currach-racing and traditional sailing vessels, pattern-days in Gaeltacht parishes, may be considered affirmative of the general Irish-language culture in the Gaeltacht. Most important of all, however, has been the influence of the Gaeltacht radio service *Radio na Gaeltachta* (established 1972) in allowing the Gaeltacht communities to speak to each other (with some diminution of dialect difficulties) and to the Irish-speaking public in the country as a whole; in re-affirming the status of the language as a community language, and in producing a general accretion of self-confidence to the people of the Gaeltacht. Not surprisingly, the demand for a Gaeltacht television service has been based on the assumption that it would significantly magnify the benign impact of *Radio na Gaeltachta*, given the pervasiveness and potency of television as a mass medium of information and entertainment. Given the cultural logic of the technological dimension of transnational capitalism, the task for all minority cultures caught in the homogenizing tide of Anglo-American information and media technology, is, in Raymond William's striking phrase, to seek to be 'the arrow rather than the target'. This is, *a fortiori*, true of a cultural minority as vulnerable as the Irish-speakers of the Gaeltacht.[20]

So far as the judicial status of Irish is concerned, all that needs to be said is that the constitutional status of Irish as the first official language is largely without practical significance, in the absence of a substantial body of statue law or of case-law making explicit the practical effects of this constitutional status. An important law report in 1986 found that so far as real rights were concerned, the Irish-speaker in Ireland, not least in the Gaeltacht, was in a position of comprehensive disadvantage in dealings with the State under the present judicial dispensation in Ireland.[21]

In conclusion we do not propose to give a balance sheet on the current state of bilingualism in the Gaeltacht. It would be difficult to find an informed commentator who takes an optimistic view of the prospects for the continued vitality of Irish as the main community language even in the core areas of the Gaeltacht, if present policies and trends continue very much longer. Hindley concluded, in 1987, that:

> "The stability of the core areas has been badly shaken by the 'modernization' and 'mobilization' which have occurred since 1970. There are now few grounds for confidence about the future of the Gaeltacht as living, functioning language communities, whatever its official boundaries. Language support on the territorial principle seems bound by default (i.e. loss of the territory) to give way to support on the individual principle - to family groups who

> merit it by what they speak rather than merely by living in the nominal Gaeltacht".[22]

Commins concurs with this verdict:

> "In this sense the language position in the Gaeltacht comes to resemble that in the rest of the country, where the distribution of competent speakers is below the densities needed to maintain a *community* of Irish users".

The cause of this is that "Gaeltacht socio-economic development is not effectively articulated with avowed linguistic aims", and, "in particular, language maintenance (in the Gaeltacht) is not part of an integrated policy of state intervention, informed by systematic research on the linkages between socio-economic change and linguistic processes".[23]

The first steps towards any real corrective action would be to make these linkages a central consideration in any development policy for the Gaeltacht. This can and will be done *only* in the context of a national policy on bilingualism, a policy informed by a sustained and sensitized approach to the linkages at a national (and indeed international) level between socio-economic development and general cultural (including linguistic) change. In the Irish historical context, this is a daunting task. In the current ideological and political climate the omens are not encouraging.[24]

Notes

1 The main contributions can be founded in the bibliography of Bord na Gaeilge (1988), *The Irish Language in a Changing Society: Shaping the Future.* An essential collection of essays is contained in Pádraig Ó Riagáin (ed.), special issue on *Language Planning in Ireland* of the *International Journal of Sociology of Language* vol. 70 (1988). Particularly useful in the preparation of this essay was Patrick Commins's 'Socio-economic development and language maintenance in the Gaeltacht', in this special issue (pp. 11-28).

1 (a) Maureen Wall, 'The Decline of the Irish language' in Brian Ó Cuív (ed.), *A View of the Irish Language* (Dublin 1969), p. 82.

2 *Tuarascáil Choimisiún na Gaeltachta* (with the volume of Evidence) was published in 1926. Ó Cuív's discussion of the figures is contained in his seminal 1951 work *Irish Dialects and Irish-speaking Districts.*

3 Reg Hindley, *Defining the Gaeltacht - Dilemmas in the Irish Language Planning* (School of European Studies, University of Bradford Research Paper) p. 1.

4 See Mícheál Ó Conghaile (eag.), *Gaeltacht Ráth Cairn: Léachtaí Comórtha* (1986).

5 Michie Akutagawa, 'A Linguistic Minority under the Protection of its own Ethnic State: A Case Study in an Irish Gaeltacht', in Gearóid MacEoin, Anders Ahlqvist and Donncha Ó hAodha (eds.), *Third International Conference on Minority Languages: Celtic Papers* (Multilingual Matters 1986).

6 For a discussion of general socio-economic change in these years see Frank Litton (ed.) *Unequal Achievement: The Irish Experience 1957-1982* (1982), and Kieran A. Kennedy (ed.), *Ireland in Transition* (1986).

7 The geographer Reg Hindley and the writer Desmond Fennell are but two of those who have engaged in fieldwork to establish the 'real' limits of the Gaeltacht. See D. Fennell, 'Can a shrinking minority be saved? Lessons from the Irish experience', in E. Haugen et al. (eds.), *Minority Languages Today* (Edinburgh, 1981) pp. 32-39.

8 Hindley, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

9 Largely in response to this demand *Údarás na Gaeltachta* was established in 1979.

10 W.F. Mackey, *Language Policy in Canada and Ireland* (Bord na Gaeilge 1982) p. 3.

11 See Commins, *op. cit.*, n. 1.

12 Commins, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

13 Mackey, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

14 Commins, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

15 See the Annual Reports of *Gaeltarra Éireann* and, since 1980, of *Údarás na Gaeltachta*. In addition to the other demographic factors mentioned in the text, it should be remembered that in the Galway Gaeltacht population increase in some measure reflects the ribbon spread of the residential suburbs of Galway westwards.

16 For a case study see M.S. Ó Cinnéide (et al), 'Industrialization and Linguistic change among Gaelic-speaking communities in the West of Ireland', in *Language Problems and Language Planning*, No. 9. For a discussion of wider implications, see Colin H. Williams, *Language Planning, Marginalty and Regional Development in the Irish Gaeltacht*. (Discussion papers in Geolinguistics: Department of Geography and Recreation studies, North Staffordshire Polytechnic. No. 10. 1985).

17 Commins, *op. cit.*, p.11.

18 Mackey, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

19 A similar criticism could be made in the areas of state policy on Health.

20 See the provocative article by Frederic Jameson 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of late Capitalism', *New Left Review*, 146 July/August (1984), pp. 53-94.

21 See *An Ghaeilge agus and Dlí*. Fasach (Dublin 1986). For a general discussion of this point see the author's 'The Irish Nation-State in the Constitution', in Brian Farrell (ed.), *De Valera's Constitution and ours* (Dublin 1988), pp. 48-50.

22 Hindley, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

23 Commins, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 23, 26.

24. Two recent stimulating contributions to the debate on the future of the Gaeltacht are Gearóid Denvir, *An Ghaeilge, An Ghaeltacht agus 1992* (Glór na nGael, Indreabhán 1989), and Nollaig Ó Gadhra, *An Ghaeltacht (Oifigiúil) - agus 1992?* (Baile Átha Cliath 1989). For a comparative dimension see the excellent Nancy C. Dorian, *Language Death: The Life Cycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect.* (Philadelphia, 1981).

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